

# Ordinance bans smoking in Closter parks

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**CLOSTER** — The Borough Council has adopted an ordinance banning smoking in public parks.

The action, taken in a 3-2 vote Wednesday night, has prompted debate focused on the merits of protecting public health versus maintaining individual freedoms and the burden the law will place on police.

A smoking ban was first brought up by Councilman Arthur Dolson, liaison to the Board of Health, who suffers from emphysema he believes is a product of secondhand smoke.

Dolson said he hopes the ordinance will prevent people from smoking around others and will allow adults to set a positive example for children.

“This is a prudent step for protecting the health and welfare of the general public,” he said.

The ordinance is just part of an ongoing campaign to teach people how to take care of their health, said Mayor Sophie Heymann. She acknowledged that smoking has not been a major problem in parks but said adopting the ordinance was a matter of “setting an example and getting an education campaign. That’s what we voted for.”

Signs will be posted to warn people against smoking, she said.

“We won’t go on patrols,” she said, “but if any uniformed officers notice it, they will certainly charge the person doing it.”

The ordinance calls for fines up to \$2,000, jail time of under 90 days or community service for under 90 days, borough officials said.

Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of Global Advisers on Smokefree Policy, applauded Closter’s move.

“We congratulate Closter for making their outdoor recreational environments healthier for kids in their community,” she said. “It’s also a great step to promote environmental initiatives since the policy helps to reduce tobacco litter in parks.”

Closter has 25 parks covered by the ordinance, and the town becomes the 11th in Bergen County to pass a 100 percent smoke-free parks measure, she said.

Blumenfeld’s group delivered smokefree parks signs to the council, which were provided by the state health department.

The 10 other municipalities with similar laws are Carlstadt, East Rutherford, Elmwood Park, Franklin Lakes, Lyndhurst, Mahwah, Moonachie, Paramus, Ridgefield and River Vale. Some enforce the law by imposing fines.

Closter Recreation Director Jim Oettinger, who spoke against the measure at the meeting, argued that he’s not opposed to banning smoking but questioned whether it should be banned in the parks.

“Many of our parks were named for veterans who died fighting for our liberties,” he pointed out. “Maybe they could have banned smoking in front of the borough hall or movie theaters.”

Councilman John Glidden, who voted against the ordinance, said he opposed it because as police commissioner, he has spoken to police officers who say a nosmoking ordinance is difficult to enforce.

“We shouldn’t pass laws that can’t be enforced,” he said.

He added that with a limited budget, it’s wasteful to ask police to spend time spotting and ticketing smokers in the park, taking them from more important safety issues.

“I would prefer a more comprehensive look at this,” he added, suggesting, for example, limiting the sale of cigarettes in town. “I don’t think this was particularly thought through in terms of our overall policy.”

[http://www.northjersey.com/closter/Ordinance\\_bans\\_smoking\\_in\\_Closter\\_parks.html](http://www.northjersey.com/closter/Ordinance_bans_smoking_in_Closter_parks.html)